UNITED
NATIONS

EP

Governing Council
of the United Nations
Environment Programme

Distr.
GENERAL

UNEP/GC.19/5
8 October 1996

ORIGINAL: ENGLISH

Nineteenth session
Nairobi, 27 January - 7 February 1997
Item 7 of the provisional agenda*

THE ENVIRONMENT FUND AND ADMINISTRATIVE AND OTHER BUDGETARY MATTERS

Developments in conference-servicing

Report of the Executive Director

Summary

By its decision 18/43 of 25 May 1995, the Governing Council approved the attachment of UNEP administrative and conference-servicing staff to a new United Nations Office in Nairobi (UNON). The present report outlines the impact of that decision on conference-servicing and the level of UNEP's financial support to the new UNON Conference Services. In addition, at its eighteenth session, the Governing Council adopted decision 18/45, on new developments in conference-servicing, and requested the Executive Director to submit a report to the Council at its nineteenth session on the issues referred to in that decision. Accordingly, the present report also outlines the developments instituted by the former UNEP Conference Services up to 31 December 1995, and further provides details on how these developments are being carried forward by UNON Conference Services since ther

Suggested action by the Governing Council

The Governing Council may wish to take note of the present report of the Executive Director.

* UNEP/GC.19/1.

Na.96-0551 141096 141096

/...

For reasons of economy, this document is printed in a limited number. Delegates are kindly requested to bring their copies to meetings and not to request additional copies.

I. INCORPORATION OF UNEP CONFERENCE-SERVICES INTO UNON

1. At the eighteenth session of the Governing Council the Executive Director reported (UNEP/GC.18/32/Add.1) on the proposed establishment on 1 January 1996 of the United Nations Office at Nairobi (UNON), to which UNEP administrative and conference-servicing staff were to be attached. The establishment of UNON and the attachment of UNEP administrative and conference-servicing staff took place as scheduled. The transition of conference services from a UNEP to a UNON service was smooth, with no disruptions to the work of any of the organizations concerned.

2. Up to 31 December 1996, the Environment Fund will continue to provide approximately 80 per cent of the support (staff, equipment, supplies etc. - in excess of $3 million annually) for UNON Conference Services under the management and administrative support costs (MASC) budget, although UNEP receives less than 50 per cent of the output of Conference Services. In effect, part of the Environment Fund's support for Conference Services has been used to subsidize the costs of the Governing Council and the Committee of Permanent Representatives, costs that should be covered by United Nations regular budget. In addition, the Environment Fund has subsidized conference-servicing costs under certain environmental conventions for which UNEP performs the secretariat functions. In view of the inequitable funding arrangements for conference-servicing, as well as the effects of the current financial crisis, from 1 January 1997 the management and administrative support costs (MASC) budget will be amended to provide minimal support (approximately $300,000) in line with UNEP's reduced conference-servicing requirements. This support will combine with United Nations regular budget funding to jointly provide UNON Conference Services with core conference-servicing staff. Under these budgetary changes, UNEP's MASC requirements will therefore fall by more than $2.9 million, a reduction that will be reflected in the revised estimates for the MASC budget for the biennium 1996-1997, which will be before the Council at its nineteenth session.

3. From 1 January 1998, this transitional arrangement will cease, and UNEP will no longer provide institutional support for UNON Conference Services from its MASC budget. Thenceforth, UNEP will only pay for the services it directly receives and it is expected that the other clients of UNON Conference Services will do likewise. In keeping with the division between MASC and programme activities, the Executive Director has decided that conference-servicing costs should be met by the requesting office. Since conference-servicing costs form an essential component of UNEP's project expenditures, they will in future be budgeted for within and charged to the respective subprogrammes. Similarly, where conference services are requested by MASC-funded units (Office of the Executive Director (OED), Fund Programme Management Branch (FPMB), Programme Support Services (PSS), Corporate Planning and Accountability Service (CPAS), Ombudsman, etc.), the appropriate direct costs will be charged to the MASC budget. These charges will be clearly levied for services rendered and are not to be confused with the previous institutional funding of a conference service from the MASC budget. It is expected that the greater transparency of reflecting direct conference-servicing costs in the programme and MASC budgets will promote improved efficiency and economy and reduce UNEP's overall conference- servicing costs.

4. UNON Conference Services now face the broader challenge of meeting the demands of a range of clients which include UNEP, United Nations Centre for Human Settlements (UNCHS) (Habitat), convention secretariats and other United Nations organizations and specialized agencies. UNON Conference Services have therefore devised a system of costing services rendered to the various client organizations that will accurately levy charges for actual work undertaken to the specific, requesting organization.

II. TECHNOLOGICAL IMPROVEMENTS TO CONFERENCE SERVICES

5. After initial development under UNEP, UNON Conference Services has continued and further refined its methods of servicing meetings outside Nairobi using remote translation. From June 1995 to June 1996, Conference Services provided remote translation for eight meetings, in addition to its regular workload for meetings and documents in Nairobi. Utilizing its experience with remote translation via electronic communication, Conference Services is now joining the network of other United Nations conference-servicing units - New York, Geneva (UNOG) and Vienna (UNOV). These conference services mutually reinforce one another by assisting in the translation workload on a reciprocal basis during slack periods. Furthermore, thanks to the improved electronic communications, UNON Conference Services can now make increased use of external translation.

6. UNON Conference Services can, as in the past, provide delegates with diskettes containing meeting documents. This process has been carried a step further: pre-, in- and post-session meeting documentation can now be posted on the Internet for interested Governments and other parties to retrieve.

III. COMMUNICATIONS FACILITIES FOR THE USE OF GOVERNMENT REPRESENTATIVES AT GIGIRI, NAIROBI

7. In addition to the Kenya Posts and Telecommunications Corporation fax, telex, telephone and mail services available at Gigiri, UNEP has established electronic network services, including electronic mail, which is already accessed by some missions in Nairobi, and will be available as an unsecured service to Government delegations by prior arrangement.

IV. ON-SITE INTERPRETATION AT GIGIRI, NAIROBI

8. In accordance with Governing Council decisions 17/34 and 18/45, the Executive Director has kept under review the issue of providing on-site interpretation at Gigiri, Nairobi. The financial viability of establishing a permanent team of interpreters at Nairobi has been carefully assessed in the light of the establishment of UNON and the creation of a common Conference Services for all Nairobi-based organizations. The annual cost to the United Nations regular budget of a permanent interpretation team has been estimated at $1.7 million. The current level of demand for interpretation at Gigiri, Nairobi (37 working days in 1995; 5 in 1996) gives no basis for establishing a permanent team. Projected reductions in resources available for programme activities are also likely to reduce the demand for interpretation. The establishment of a permanent interpretation team is

therefore precluded for the foreseeable future. UNON Conference Services will, however, be actively involved in the ongoing experiments with remote interpretation being carried out within the United Nations system with a view to achieving future savings over the current cost of interpretation at Gigiri, Nairobi.

V. REDUCTION OF GOVERNING COUNCIL AND OTHER DOCUMENTATION

9. As at the previous session, the Executive Director has attempted to limit documents as far as possible, for the present session to a maximum of four pages. As requested by the Governing Council in paragraph 9 of its decision 18/45, the Executive Director has also encouraged all convention secretariats administered by UNEP to follow the same practice. However, it should be noted that the technical nature of reports submitted to meetings of the Convention may prohibit adherence to the four-page rule.